

[By Greg Guma](#)

Standing at a landmark "democracy" sculpture in downtown Burlington on Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Peter Welch outlined a short-term strategy to counteract the impact of the US Supreme Court's Citizens United decision.

Welch was home at the start of a two-week recess. After a morning at the South Royalton Market and GW Plastics, he stopped to speak at the Barre Rotary Club before arriving on Main Street in Burlington, gathering with the press down the block from the Chittenden Superior Court Building.

He was joined there by Winooski resident Robert Millar and VPIRG Director Paul Burns, who said a Tuesday vote in Montpelier by the Senate Government Operations Committee in support of a constitutional amendment resolution increases the chances the issue will come up for a floor vote in the Vermont Legislature.

Welch, a Democrat, reiterated his support for an amendment to declare that corporations aren't people, and introduced Millar, who spoke enthusiastically about 65 successful Town Meeting votes on the issue in March.

Adopting a constitutional amendment "is a drastic and difficult solution," Millar acknowledged. But "we have reached one of those critical points in our history where it may be our only option," he said.

Welch sees the need for immediate action by Congress, the federal government and President Obama to "mitigate" the impacts of Citizens United on current and future campaigns until such an amendment does become law. To that end he outlined three practical steps — legislation that increases disclosure, tougher enforcement by the IRS and Federal Election Commission, and presidential recess appointment of new FEC commissioners.

Pointing to partisan gridlock, both in Congress and at the FEC, he reported that the GOP has refused to replace commissioners whose terms have expired. This adds to a public perception of bureaucratic paralysis. Welch and 32 colleagues want Obama to fill five vacancies during the congressional recess.

"They're not doing their job," he said of the opposition. "Let the Senate act, but let them vote yes or no, up or down. They're not even taking them for consideration."

Welch and 31 congressional colleagues also call on the IRS to investigate whether 501(c)4 organizations affiliated with Super PACs are violating federal law. Organizations that receive tax-exempt, non-profit status are usually prohibited from engaging in political activity.

"Now we have political organizations masquerading as social welfare organization," Welch charged, "and they are basically using taxpayer-subsidized tax exemptions to do this work. An extreme example is the Crossroads GPS of Karl Rove."

The third strategy is to pass a federal disclosure law that increases transparency and shareholder oversight. The thrust is to require shareholder approve before spending company funds on a campaign, disclosure of funding sources and on-air disclaimers. "In other words, at the end of an ad it would say, 'I am president of X company and I approve this ad'," Welch said.

Burns pointed to earlier court decisions that set the stage for Citizens United, including a 1976 decision that equated money with speech. "These are errors by the Supreme Court," he charged, "that have corrupted the political process and endangered our democracy. And the people of Vermont have spoken out on Town Meeting Day."

Nevertheless, he and Welch stressed that amending the U.S. Constitution is likely to be a long and difficult process. In the meantime, "there are things than can and should be done," Burns added. That is why he said VPIRG backs Welch's multi-pronged approach.

